



For Immediate Release

Dec. 23, 2010

Release #. 101223-01

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(CTZ Public Affairs)

2SCR Trooper Brings Fellow Soldiers Closer to Home

Zabul, Afghanistan- Christmas will soon be upon us. The Dragoons of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment will spend this Christmas in a foreign land instead of with family and friends around the tree or singing carols at home. Though they may not be at home this year, they will be receiving a little Christmas cheer courtesy of the Chaplains Corps and a variety of nonprofit organizations dedicated to providing Soldiers with care packages from home.

One such program is Operation Close to Home. Close to Home was started by one of 2SCR's own Troopers, Spc. Karl Van Burkleo and his wife Regina. Van Burkleo, a Chaplain's assistant with FIRES Squadron, is currently deployed to the Zabul Province of Afghanistan. Working as part of the Unit Ministry Team, VanBurkleo noticed that simple things like body wash, toothpaste or candy could be a big morale booster to those Dragoons who were miles away from the nearest Post Exchange or store.

"Operation Close to Home was an organization my wife and I started to get things such as toiletries and goodies to the guys in 2SCR," Van Burkleo said. "If I am not able to supply the requests of the Soldiers through the many other charitable organizations out there, I can get in touch with my wife and get whatever it is from her."

“Our goal with this program is to bring a little bit of home to the brave men and women you proudly serve in the U.S. and UK military. Hopefully, making their time out there a little more comfortable,” said Regina.

To implement their new program, Regina turned to what has slowly become a Soldier’s best friend for staying in contact with their loved ones, the popular social network site known as Facebook.

For Regina the decision to establish OCH on Facebook was a simple one.

“To be perfectly honest,” she said, “I chose it because I know how to use it and most of my family and friends are already on it. I can keep them up to date with the program.”

Regina has also found it to be a great way to gain new recruits to the cause.

“Anyone who is on Facebook can easily refer their friends or family members to the site,” she said. “I want to get as many people involved as possible.”

Regina and Karl have already developed quite a baseline of supporters to include Enterprise Rent-A-Car UK, where Regina works as a human resource manager. Several schools have also begun collecting items for the Dragoons. These are Barrow Primary School in England as well as Holmquist Elementary School in Houston, Texas. The American Legion Post in Sanderson, Texas has also contributed greatly to OCH.

One supporter holds a special place in the VanBurkleo’s hearts.

“The parents of an Eagle Scout Troop in Texas contacted the site,” Regina recalled. They exchanged a few emails and they became friends. Regina and Karl visited the family while in Houston on R&R and a special bond was born.

“Now they are helping their son collect items for his Eagle Scout project,” Regina said.

Regina said she is kind of surprised that OCH doesn’t take up much of her time at all.

“Most of my time is spent marketing it,” she said, “making appointments to talk to people and then collecting things. ” She also admits her job is made a lot easier because many supporters ship their donations straight to Karl themselves.

Anyone interested in becoming part of Operation Close to Home is urged to visit their site at: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=141118052581200>. Donations can also be sent directly to the Soldiers at the following address;

Unit Ministry Team
C/O SPC Van Burkleo, Karl G.
Fires SQDN HHB 2SCR
FOB Lagman/Qalat
APO AE 09383



Thanks: Spc. Karl Van Burkleo distributes some toiletries to Soldiers that were donated through the Operation Close to Home program.

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Giving Back: Spc. Karl Van Burkleo restocks the shelves at the base chapel at Forward Operating Base Lagman with supplies that were donated through the Operation Close to Home program.